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ABSTRACT

The "do's and don'ts" for submitting articles to regional versus national journals are much the same, according to one journal editor. Do not just print a copy of a conference paper and send it to an editor. First, look up back issues of the journal to see if the paper would be appropriate for the journal. Do submit a paper to only one journal at a time, do include a cover letter, do follow appropriate procedures if the paper is to be returned, do double-space the article, and do provide the journal with the paper on a computer data disk if requested. Do expect revisions. (RS)

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Do's And Don'ts When Submitting Research Articles to Regional Journals

A Paper Delivered to the 78th Annual Convention
of the Speech Communication Association,
Chicago, IL, Oct. 30, 1992

By Ralph Donald, Professor and Chairman,
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and Editor of *The Mid-Atlantic Almanack*,
the Journal of the Mid-Atlantic Popular Culture Association

First of all, the dos and don'ts for submitting articles to regional vs. national journals are pretty much the same. I think that the only major difference has to do with accessibility -- regional journals just happen to be a little more open to the scholar without a major league portfolio -- and this often happens to be the scholar who teaches at the small college. But don't take this to mean that regional journals are pushovers -- not by any means. Bad submissions are bad submissions, and whether you're editing a national, regional, or a state journal, you see plenty. And the regional journal editor wants his or her journal to publish quality work just as much as the national editor -- it's just that at the national level, one can be extraordinarily picky.

Regional and state journals are often targeted for a scholar's first journal submission. Because of this, our journals often receive work that looks, reads, and presents itself as coming from the inexperienced. So, in this presentation, I thought I'd provide a few helpful hints to the uninitiated -- that is, those who as yet cannot paper their office walls with rejection slips. I hope this line of discussion isn't too tedious for those among you who have already found out most of this -- but if you're like me, you've often made these discoveries through the costly process of trial and error.

To begin, you come across a call for papers for a journal. The journal's title sounds like it might be right for your current research interest, or for that paper you presented last spring at convention. Don't just print a copy of that convention paper and fire it off to the editor. Do a few things first:

- a. Go to your library and look up a few back issues of the journal. At a small college, that might be quite a problem. They may not subscribe. But there's always interlibrary loan.
- b. Look the journal over: If it's a disciplinary journal, do you have academic or professional credentials in this discipline? This can be a real problem. In some cases, another discipline's journal won't look at your piece if you don't seem to belong. For example, your article takes a psychological approach to some communication phenomenon, so you send it off to a journal on psychology. The editor may take one look and reject it, figuring that this may be a not-too-good communication piece by a comm. professor who's been rejected a few times in his/her discipline. The letter will politely suggest that you submit it to

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- a communication journal.
- c. Look the journal over some more: If it's a communications journal, or an interdisciplinary one like mine, what kind of articles does it publish? Does it seem to favor a certain research paradigm to the exclusion of others? Is each issue open and eclectic, or does it sometimes/only publish "theme issues," editions devoted to a particular topic that's not always shared in advance with subscribers and would-be authors?
 - d. Assume that everything seems to fit. The journal indeed seems to be right for your article. What next?

Look for the fine print in the masthead, or in some other portion of the journal, and carefully read the boilerplate about submissions. Is it an open journal, or is it restricted to just the membership of the organization? In other words, how much by way of yearly dues are you expected to pay for the privilege of being considered for publication? Most, including mine, equivocate on the issue, stating delicately that "Contributing authors are asked, but not required, to become members of the Association. Membership benefits include a subscription to the journal and the association newsletter." In other words, authors must pay for a copy of their own work.

It's hard to believe, but nearly half of the submissions I receive have something technically wrong before I ever sit down to read them. I received one last year with no note, no cover letter, no address or phone number, just an old convention paper with the name of an individual and the name of his college. So, let's go over what you should do before sending an article to my journal. My requirements aren't terribly different than anyone else's, and in some ways, especially regarding style, it's more forgiving.

At the top of this "to do" list is this: Remember that it's unethical to send out your manuscript to more than one potential publisher at a time. Hedging your bet by sending out multiple submissions of the same manuscript means that many editors and reviewers are going to have to read and evaluate the same article, but only one will get to publish it. That's unfair. We're all too busy to review something we may not get permission to print. If someone is known to send multiple submissions, that person will be rejected from the outset. Choose one journal at a time, and if your article is rejected, then you're free to send it to another. However, before you turn it back around to send out to the next journal, you may first wish to consider any editorial comments and criticisms the editor may have provided. Some editors, myself included, enclose pertinent reviewer comments with both acceptance letters and those hard-to-write rejection notes. Why not make it better before sending it out again? After all, the best writing is re-writing, and a better-written piece will have a better chance the next time up to bat.

When you submit your article, provide the editor with a cover letter. Begin with an introduction, and proceed to list the title and a very brief, paragraph-length synopsis of your piece. Make it sound interesting -- you're really selling at this point. If articles are blind-reviewed, list your name only on the title page of the article. This can be a problem for those articles done in APA style. When in doubt, call the editor and ask for

advice. Read in the journal's masthead notes how many copies are required. We ask for three, and if we don't get them, I'll write the author prior to review requesting additional copies. Regional journals don't have big budgets -- We all must cut corners on expenses.

Some journals, including mine, also request that if you want your manuscripts returned, you must provide a stamped, self-addressed envelope. I've received all sorts of variations on that theme -- from a legal-sized envelope with no stamp, to an eight-and-a-half by eleven envelope with insufficient postage, to a dollar bill paper-clipped to the article. At first I wasn't sure if it was for postage or a terribly cheap bribe.

Style becomes an issue in many journals. Some strictly adhere to one version or the other, and will send it back to you numerous times for revisions. Since these continual, annoying, style revision requests are about as pleasant as being pecked to death by ducks, why not begin by consulting a style manual? Also check out the journal itself to see how things are presented. Sometimes the editor takes quirky, personal liberties with style. Incidentally, since my journal is interdisciplinary, we allow authors to use the style favored by their discipline. MLA is our default style.

Length is also a consideration. Most journals stipulate a maximum length, including bibliography. If they don't, you may assume that fifteen double-spaced pages is OK. But I'd check to be sure. As far as my journal goes, the shorter the better -- so I have room for more articles.

Incidentally, always double-space your copy -- Although most of the submissions I read come from professors, I still receive some that appear to be from undergraduates instead of academics: Tired old printer ribbon, unreadable photocopies, poor grammar, spelling, and proofreading. And while I'm complaining, one more thing: It's fine to rewrite a convention paper for submission to a journal. Sharing ideas with colleagues at an annual meeting is a great way to test a thesis, and gather informal feedback on our work. But please remember to rewrite it! I get a trifle annoyed when I read a proposed article that begins, "It's a pleasure to be here in Altoona for this panel today. . ."

Many journals, including my own, save typesetting costs by importing IBM or Macintosh text files into their desktop publishing programs. This means that once a publication decision is made, and revisions have been accomplished, some journals will request a copy of your computer data disc. So you'll save yourself a lot of time and headache if you begin this process on computer rather than on typewriter. Revisions will be simpler, too.

Speaking of revisions, expect some. We wouldn't be academics if we weren't a little opinionated about something -- so you can count on requests for revisions. Please don't take these requests personally. Someone's looking at the big picture, and trying to make their journal just a little better, a little sharper. If a reviewer's comments and suggestions are dead wrong, get on the phone and discuss the issues with the editor. Explain your difficulty with proposed changes, and usually you can come to some sort of compromise that will satisfy, if not please, everyone. I realize that a giraffe can be defined as a "horse designed by committee," but then most of you who have written

dissertations have gone through this before. Nothing changes, except the names of the players. And remember the slogan of academic argument: "The smaller the issue, the greater the controversy."

In closing, I hope you are all successful in identifying the right journal for your hard work, and that my comments help in some way to make the process go smoother. And if you have a piece that falls into the category of popular cultural criticism, I hope you'll send it to the *Mid-Atlantic Almanack*. Thanks.